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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4251
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0710
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9485
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4032
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1511
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3209
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6586
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4196
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0627
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0628
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0245
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2568
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0225
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000325

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2016
TAGS: PREL PGOV BM ID
SUBJECT: YUDHOYONO VISIT TO BURMA: LIGHT AND FLUFFY

REF: A. 05 RANGOON 973

1B. SECSTATE 29380

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Classified By: P/E Chief W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Indonesian President Yudhoyono's March 1-2 visit to Burma appears to have been purely protocol and devoid of any substantive political message to regime leaders. SPDC Chairman Than Shwe gave the Indonesian President a standard recitation of regime achievements and its road map to a democracy "that fits Burma," claiming that international pressure is slowing the process. We are told that Than Shwe declined Yudhoyono's request for a one-on-one meeting, offering that the top generals are a team and have nothing to hide from one another.

12. (C) The Burmese regime pursued this visit aggressively, using it not only for the perceived legitimacy that a state visit bestows, but also to water down the unprecedented unified stance on Burma that ASEAN leaders adopted at their December Summit. In doing so, the generals applied the same "divide and rule" tactics to ASEAN leaders that they use to break down unity among domestic opposition and ethnic groups.
End Summary.

13. (U) The Burmese official media gave top billing to Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's March 1-2 visit to Rangoon. Per usual practice, however, the regime did not reveal any details on the substance of the two-day state visit, instead devoting official coverage to Yudhoyono's visits to Rangoon's Shwedagon Pagoda and the regime's National Museum. The GOB media mentioned only Yudhoyono's wife, Kristiani Herrawati, and Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda as participants in the large Indonesian delegation. The regime did not accord Yudhoyono the same pomp and circumstance that it has this week for the

visit of Indian President Kalam.

A COURTESY CALL AND NO MORE

¶4. (C) On March 3, Indonesian Ambassador Wyoso Prodjowarsito briefed members of the diplomatic corps on Yudhoyono's 30-hour visit. Wyoso described the visit, Yudhoyono's first to Burma, as "just a courtesy call" to get acquainted with regime leaders. The Indonesian President did not press the SPDC on political reform issues, such as democracy or the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, although Wyoso admitted when questioned that UNSYG Kofi Annan and UN human rights envoy Pinheiro had requested Yudhoyono raise these topics.

¶5. (C) Wyoso said that the visit focused on increasing bilateral cooperation. Accordingly, Indonesian FM Wirajuda and Burmese FM Nyan Win signed an MOU establishing a joint commission for bilateral cooperation and agreed on future plans to conclude separate agreements in areas such as culture and trade. The first joint commission meeting will take place in April or May in Jakarta. Wyoso said that Indonesia hopes to have some agreements ready by then, but admitted that nothing much has come of past agreements with Burma. He added that Yudhoyono had designated former Home Affairs Minister Hari Sabarno as his special advisor to follow up on the bilateral agreements.

DEMOCRACY THAT FITS BURMA

¶6. (C) Wyoso said that Yudhoyono had two brief discussions with SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe. The first meeting was a 45-minute session that included SPDC Deputy Chairman Vice Senior General Maung Aye, MOD Chief of General Staff General Thura Shwe Man, PM Lt Gen Soe Win, Secretary-1

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Lt Gen Thein Sein, FM Nyan Win, and the Burmese Ambassador to Indonesia. Joining Yudhoyono were Wirajuda, Sabarno, Economic Coordinating Minister Boediono, former FM Ali Alatas, and Amb. Wyoso. Yudhoyono, who requested a private meeting with Than Shwe, met the SPDC Chairman in a brief follow-on meeting that also included the other four SPDC generals from the first meeting. Amb. Wyoso did not participate in the "private" meeting and had nothing to offer on what was discussed.

¶7. (C) At the first session, according to Wyoso, Than Shwe described regime plans to move to a democracy "that fits Burma," claiming that international pressure had slowed progress. Than Shwe also claimed to be interested in the "happiness" of the Burmese people, but added that democracy should not jeopardize the people's welfare. The Senior General used to rest of the meeting to recite, as usual, progress the regime claims to have achieved through construction of roads and dams. When diplomats asked if Yudhoyono would make a report about his meetings in Burma to ASEAN, Wyoso replied that Malaysian Foreign Minister Hamid is supposed to brief ASEAN Foreign Ministers on Burma in Bali April 19-20.

¶8. (C) A/CDA and P/E Chief met on March 8 with Leon de Riedmatten, local liaison for the UNSYG's Special Envoy to Burma. De Riedmatten traveled to Jakarta in February with then-Special Envoy Razali to encourage the GOI to raise political reform issues with the regime. They met with Alatas, Wirajuda, and foreign policy advisor Dino Patti Djalal, among others, but all rejected any expectation that Yudhoyono would press for reform. They only agreed that the President might relate Indonesia's experience in transitioning from military to elected civilian rule if Than Shwe was willing to listen.

¶9. (C) According to de Riedmatten, Than Shwe was not willing to listen. When Yudhoyono spontaneously requested a

one-on-one with the SPDC Chairman at the end of the bilateral session, Than Shwe refused and said the generals were a team and had nothing to hide from one another. Yudhoyono's "private" meeting with the top five generals followed and, according to de Riedmatten, Than Shwe unceremoniously ended it after less than ten minutes of pleasantries.

POWERS STUCK IN THE 70S

¶10. (C) Adik Wibowo, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Burma, attended a private lunch that Yudhoyono joined with the local Indonesian community. She said Yudhoyono told the participants that Burma appeared to be stuck in the 1970s, while Indonesia moved forward and changed. The Indonesian President offered his opinion that the Burmese military looked like it would stay in power for another four to seven years. He also commented that it was "very strange" that the generals had relocated the capital to remote Pyinmana when there are so many other urgent needs in the country.

COMMENT: DIVIDE AND RULE

¶11. (C) Senior Indonesian officials have suggested in foreign press reports that Yudhoyono raised political issues with the SPDC, including the need for national reconciliation and a more inclusive "road map to democracy." By all accounts, however, the visit was little more than an introductory "courtesy call" devoid of any substantive political message to regime leaders.

¶12. (C) Several well-connected local observers have told us

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that the GOB aggressively pursued the Yudhoyono visit immediately following the December ASEAN Summit. The GOB also pushed India to move up the date of President Kalam's state visit from late 2006 to this month. Not only do such ceremonial visits bestow a perception of legitimacy on the regime, they also help the SPDC stall other visitors with more sensitive agendas, like Malaysian FM Hamid. In doing so, the generals are applying the same tactics of "divide and rule" and "ignore offers to mediate" to ASEAN leaders that they use to break unity among domestic opposition parties and ethnic groups. End Comment.

STOLTZ